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ANTI-COMMUNIST RESISTANCE POTENTIAL IN THE SOVIET BLOC
NORTH VIETNAM: PARTS II, B-E; III

II. RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES TO DATE 1/

B. Organized Resistance Groups

1. Introduction

At the time of the armistice guerrilla groups represented almost the sole organized anti-Communist resistance in North Vietnam. Although there has been little information since the conclusion of the armistice (reports on actual units being almost entirely pre-armistice), indications are that the capability of these groups has been rapidly deteriorating and will continue to do so.

As far as is known, there is no effective clandestine resistance net (in contrast to guerrilla warfare) presently capable of operating in North Vietnam. The French have made unsuccessful attempts among the Vietnamese to organize groups of armed men who emerge at night to harass the enemy. No clandestine sabotage, evasion and escape or psychological warfare capability exists outside of guerrilla units. French attempts to organize clandestine resistance units in the Thanh Hoa-Vinh region have failed.

It is estimated that perhaps 100-200 native French regulars, mostly Vietnamese but some tribal people, were,

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at the time of the armistice, developing groups in North Vietnam for guerrilla and other resistance activities. However, unless these individuals are operating in terrain which affords them sufficient protection, their ability to remain in the area without being spotted by routine Viet Minh security units is highly questionable.

2. Guerrilla Strength

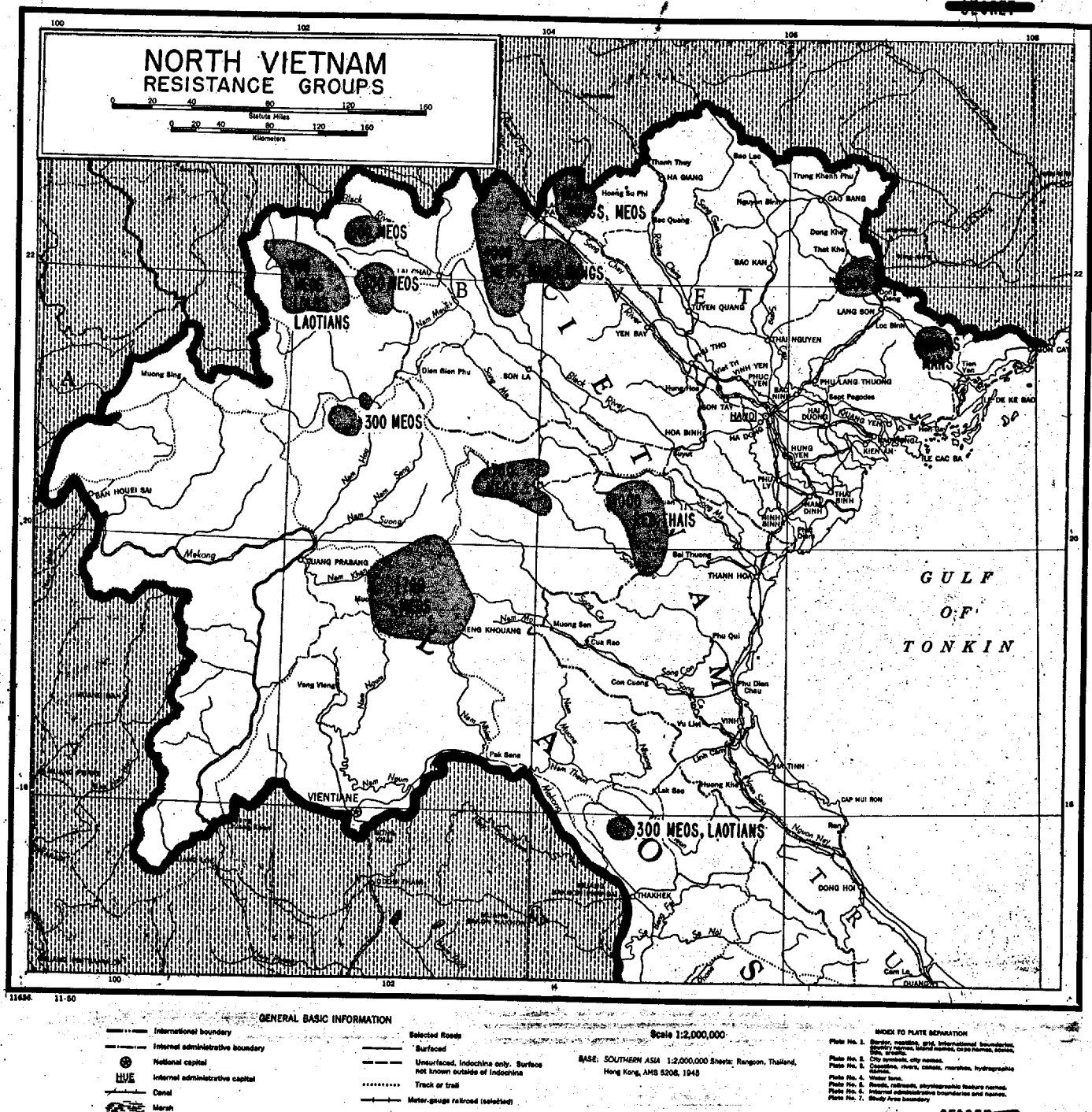
In July 1954 guerrilla strength in North Vietnam and adjacent areas in Upper Laos was approximately 7,000. However, as a result of the armistice, guerrilla capability is rapidly deteriorating. In July 1954 guerrilla strength was reportedly disposed as follows:*

a. 4,000 Thais, Meos, Mans and Nungs along the right bank of Red River in an area bounded by Phong Tho (N 22-25, E 103-20), Cha Pa (N 22-15, E 103-55) Nghia Lo (N 22-05, E 102-25) and the Black River. These forces had periodically controlled three landing fields suitable for light planes. Their harassing tactics have been quite effective and they are reportedly the best guerrilla force in North Vietnam.

b. Approximately 1,200 Meos, Lolos and Laotians around Muong Nhie (N 22-05, E 102-25) and Phong Saly

* a map depicting these dispositions is attached.

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(N 21-35, E 102-05). Although badly mauled by a three battalion Viet Minh offensive in February and March 1954, this group has managed to retain its identity. It has radio contact with the French.

c. A group of about 1,000 Red Thais on the Vietnam-Laotian border west of Thanh Hoa (N 19-40, E 105-50).

d. Approximately 600 Nungs and Meos east of Lao Kay.

e. Formerly there were some 300 or more Nungs and Mans around Tien Yen (N 21-15, E 107-25), however, these people were of small value for offensive type operations. Their present status is unknown.

f. An unknown number of Thos northwest of Lang Son showing prospects of developing into a guerrilla force.

g. Some key leaders and groups have been evacuated to Laos by the French. They could be brought back into North Vietnam by air but it is not likely because of French reluctance to break the armistice terms.

The guerrilla forces mainly constitute defensive holding groups. Except for a raid on Lao Kay (N 22-20, E 103-38) in September 1953, they have not made one important

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offensive strike. The tribal people are basically afraid of the Vietnamese and are desirous of defending their home areas. They have proved willing to attack small Viet Minh units, but will not even harass larger forces. Generally when the Viet Minh arrive in strength, men, women, children and cattle withdraw to the hills.

Most of the guerrillas are armed with out-dated equipment. Many are still equipped with old muzzle-loading rifles; these are very effective scatter-guns suitable for close ambushes. The tribes have had considerable difficulty in obtaining enough black powder for their weapons. Although most of the guerrillas are infantry, some in the drier bush regions have ponies. Guerrilla sabotage potential, albeit small, is undeveloped. The groups have some limited air reception, radio communication and landing strip construction capabilities. Last radio contact with guerrilla units was on 7 October.

Generally the effectiveness of the guerrilla movement is low. Results are very small for the number of troops involved. The units are not located in important areas and at present no group has access to any principal supply line. The guerrilla zone covering Viet Minh supply lines into Upper Laos constituted more of a nuisance zone than a serious threat to enemy communications. In spite

of the obvious vulnerability of the tens of thousands of coolies carrying supplies over isolated mountain trails, the guerrillas have been largely ineffective. Since the guerrillas are primarily interested in defending their homes, they have not been used very effectively outside of their home area. The units are poorly trained and probably a majority are commanded by untrained tribal chiefs. They fight either too hard or not at all; almost never follow the middle road of guerrilla harassment. As a result some units have been almost annihilated in pitched battles in fixed positions, while some elements have gone underground without firing a shot.

3. Sabotage

Except for the very limited but largely undeveloped sabotage potential of guerrilla groups, no organized sabotage potential exists in North Vietnam.

4. Escape and Evasion

Guerrilla groups in northwest Tonkin have recovered some French Union personnel isolated behind enemy lines. No escape and evasion capability existed in areas that were too tightly controlled for the overt existence of guerrilla forces.

5. Information collection

Guerrilla groups have carried out an information collection and reporting mission. External contact has

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been maintained by radio. When guerrilla units have been cut up and become ineffective, information collection has often become their primary mission. Most information is gained from direct observation, low-level contacts with the local population and interrogation of occasional prisoners of war. The quality of information is often not good because of the lack of intelligence-trained personnel within most guerrilla commands. Unfortunately, the guerrillas do not seem to have an adequate intelligence organization for even their own tactical needs as shown by the number of times they have been surprised by the Viet Minh.

Before the armistice the Vietnam National Police and Surete in North Vietnam operated networks of agents in Viet Minh controlled territory as well as in portions of the Delta region which were heavily infiltrated by the Viet Minh. It had been reported that these agents numbered five hundred, but intelligence operations of the police will be substantially curtailed by evacuation of Hanoi and environs, and the lack of organizational unity within the police itself. 2/

6. The Catholics

Prior to the armistice a Catholic army of about 11,000 men was located primarily in the three major Catholic areas of the north--Phat Diem, Bui Chu and Hanoi.

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After the signing of the armistice, the French, who have been virtually the sole material supporter of the army, removed them to the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The current whereabouts of this group is unknown, although it is probable that the bulk of them have been or will be removed to South Vietnam.

In the three above-mentioned Catholic dioceses there are over a million Catholics. They constitute the northern faction of Catholics which is completely separated from, and has little contact with the south. The bishops in these areas are highly respected by the Catholics. Under their leadership most Catholics have resisted Viet Minh attempts to win them over. This closeness of this group and their dislike for the Viet Minh lends itself to possible clandestine activity within their area.

The Catholic army had been very effective in beating back Viet Minh incursions during the war. However, if the army has been moved to the south, then the resistance potential of this large group of dissident Catholics will probably have to be confined to passive resistance.

C. Unorganized Resistance

No information is available on the nature of current unorganized resistance, if any.

D. External Sponsorship of Resistance

External sponsorship of resistance in North Vietnam

has come from the French and the French-supported government of South Vietnam. There is little likelihood of much support from Vietnamese emigre groups which have, thus far, almost entirely supported the Ho Chi Minh movement.

E. Countermeasures of the Communist Regime

1. Introduction

The conventional Communist control measures--documentation, mass organizations, security police and Communist Party controls--are employed by the Viet Minh in North Vietnam. In addition troops have been employed against guerrilla groups. Except for anti-guerrilla operations, it is too early to predict the effectiveness of countermeasures under peacetime conditions. Undoubtedly they can become more effective because more attention could be focused on the elimination of subversive elements.

2. The Viet Minh Public Security Service (Cong An) 3/

The functions of the Cong An are the investigation and neutralization of all activities detrimental to the security of the State and the acquisition and centralization of reports on domestic affairs and external relations. Within this broad jurisdiction it has the following anti-resistance functions:

- a. Counterespionage.
- b. Implementation of laws and regulations regarding

internal surveillance. This includes the maintaining of a constant check upon the loyalties of all individuals in the Viet Minh zone.

c. Investigation of anti-government activities of Vietnamese and foreigners both within and without North Vietnam.

d. Protection of Viet Minh organizations and installations, including munitions depots, lines of communication, military cantonments and movements of troops.

Steps taken by the Cong An to control subversive activities are:

a. Tight control of travel to and from the Viet Minh zone.

b. Institution of the mutual informer system among the population. Under this system each five to ten families are grouped together, ostensibly to cooperate on intelligence collection. The actual purpose is to have the families keep a check on each others' activities and report them to the Cong An. Thus the Viet Minh can more easily control reactionary elements.

c. Establishment of a clandestine organization with an extensive informant net in Franco-Vietnamese areas to tab potential potential anti-Viet Minh resis-

tance elements for possible future neutralization.

d. Requiring each person in Viet Minh-held territory to belong to a Communist or patriotic organization and report on fellow members.

3. Anti-Guerrilla Operations

In September 1953 the Viet Minh high command created a Central Committee for the Repression of Bandits in order to oppose French-supported guerrilla activity. This committee receives its direction from Gen Vo Nguyen Giap, the Minister of Defense and chief of the Viet Minh army. The committee furnishes instructions to sub-committees which initially directed Viet Minh regional troops. These regional troops were unable to handle their responsibility and were gradually replaced with regular troops. In October and November 1953, five Viet Minh battalions were withdrawn from the forces encircling the Tonkin Delta and were assigned to "liquidate the bandits" operating in the area between the Song Ma and Black Rivers. In March 1954 approximately 10 regular Viet Minh companies, as well as an increasing number of regional units were engaged in "liquidation" activities against guerrillas in the Lao Kay, Phong Tho, Lai Chau, Phong Saly and Muong Nhie areas. 4/

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III. RESISTANCE POTENTIAL 1/

Only a short period of time has elapsed since the status of North Vietnam was changed by the signing of the armistice which provided for French withdrawal from the area, except for Haiphong which is to be evacuated in May 1955. There is at present insufficient information by which to judge, with any degree of accuracy, the future resistance potential of anti-Communist elements in the area.

Until the situation jells and it is ascertained what control measures and restrictive practices the Viet Minh will institute, it will not be possible to know the conditions under which resistance elements will be forced to operate. It can be assumed, however, on the basis of practices in other Communist-controlled countries, that the Viet Minh regime will exercise tight security controls over the area through the army and the Cong An, the Viet Minh security police. It may also be assumed that all efforts will be taken to suppress all traces of anti-regime activity, particularly militant guerrilla groups.

Resistance potential will also be adversely affected by the anti-French attitude of the majority of ethnic Vietnamese. French support of resistance units, therefore, could materially limit the amount of support such units would re-

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ceive from the basically anti-French populace. It is to be noted in this connection, that most of the known resistance elements are composed of non-ethnic Vietnamese.

A. Under cold warfare conditions

Existing organized resistance groups are for the most part, poorly-equipped and poorly-trained. The development of escape and evasion facilities, some training activities and the collection of information probably are the current limits of the capabilities of such groups. In the matter of intelligence gathering, communications will present a particularly difficult problem. Unorganized resistance would probably be limited to various types of passive resistance on an intermittent basis.

It is to be expected that the already limited capabilities for organized or unorganized resistance will be further curtailed as the Viet Minh regime tightens its controls.

Expansion or intensification of resistance activities would be dependent to a large degree on the ability of resistance elements to obtain logistic support and to train personnel in the use of equipment. Most of the materiel now in the hands of resistance units is out-of-date or in poor condition. To bring in new supplies overland would be a difficult and hazardous task through clandestine movements

by resistance units. This would perforce limit the size and types of equipment that could be moved. French agreement to an armistice provision banning French overflights of North Vietnam eliminates the air drop possibility except for possible missions sponsored by third countries.

Any expansion in resistance capabilities would require greater cooperation between existing resistance units. Most existing groups are in isolated mountains or valleys leading to poor contact between groups. Tribal units, which compose a large portion of the resistance potential, are dispersed over wide areas and often consider themselves answerable only to the village headman. Many of the tribes also have mutual animosities. These factors have tended to create a loose organization and have forced any organizing authority to deal with each small group individually. An increase in inter-unit contact and cooperation is necessary for an efficient expansion of activities. Conversely, any outbreak of old rivalries between groups could cause a major cleavage among resistance groups. The Viet Minh is trying to win over the support of some of these tribes such as by buying the opium crop from the Meos, the chief source of this tribe's income.

The major factor which will effect an increase or decrease in resistance will be the strictness of security

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measures enforced by the Viet Minh. Although in this brief period since officially assuming control of the area the Communists have made certain gestures which would appear on the surface to be giving the people more freedom and some economic relief, it is not in keeping with traditional Communist policy to maintain them after the initial appearance of an "easier life" is no longer necessary. It is very likely that within a short period of time tight measures will be enforced. Since large portions of North Vietnam have been under Viet Minh control for some time, it should not be too long before a rigid security net will encircle the area. Under cold war conditions it is unlikely that these controls, once imposed, will be relaxed enough to materially increase resistance capability. It will probably become more and more difficult for resistance units to achieve their goals.

Even if a breakdown or let-down in security measures were to take place, there is little likelihood that resistance capability would be materially increased due to the inadequate training and poor equipment of existing resistance elements. Sufficient support to raise this level would have to come from outside the country. This would be very difficult for the reasons mentioned above in regard to supply difficulties.

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There appears little likelihood that many new recruits will join organized resistance elements in the near future. It is also unlikely that many new groups can be formed unless the Viet Minh does something to drastically dispel the position they have carefully built up, that they are nationalists firsts and Communists second, an action not too likely at the present time. Among ethnic Vietnamese elements only the Catholics seem likely to undertake any active resistance; among tribal groups there is more likelihood but greater difficulties in organizing, training and supplying. Because of the nationalism claims of the Viet Minh it is not probable that many would desire a replacement of the Viet Minh regime, the first "non-colonial" government they have had for some time.

B. Under Conditions of Open Warfare

The resistance potential in North Vietnam, under conditions of open warfare in Indochina, will depend to a considerable extent upon the situation existing prior to the outbreak of hostilities and the amount of resistance potential developed under cold war conditions. Because there has been insufficient opportunity to observe resistance and estimate resistance potential even under existing conditions, any present estimate of hot war resistance potential will necessarily be highly conjectural.

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Even such limited types of resistance as evasion and escape support, training and information collection under conditions of open warfare would be dependent upon (a) whether existing groups are able to survive countermeasures employed against them during the cold war period; (b) the extent to which security controls will be disrupted by open warfare; and, (c) the effectiveness of the training and supply program during the cold war period.

Assuming a reasonable degree of success in (c) the guerrilla groups will still have only a limited guerrilla warfare capability. Of all the groups, only the Thos, and possibly the Nungs and Mans (all located in the Lang Son area) are in a position to disrupt any major activity such as the movements of overland supply columns along north-south routes from Communist China into North Vietnam. The unwillingness of most guerrilla groups to move any considerable distance from their tribal area limits their effectiveness.

Training and information collection can continue. However, information collected will be of limited value except for those groups strategically located. Any independent military action will be limited to small scale guerrilla raids and ambushes. Such a capability will depend almost entirely upon extensive outside support in the form of training and

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supply. Existing groups will have no capability for gaining control over large territorial areas in northern Tonkin as the Viet Minh did in World War II from 1943 onwards. It is possible that existing groups can be utilized in a clandestine psychological warfare capacity to spread rumors, distribute pamphlets, etc.

Willingness of groups to actively resist will hinge upon the degree of success which forces engaged against the Viet Minh are enjoying. Such forces must show signs of winning. If on the other hand, the invader is losing, the strongly anti-Viet Minh elements are likely to do nothing to antagonize the regime preferring to wait for a turn in the tide of war. Those groups only lukewarmly opposed to the Viet Minh are likely to jump on the Viet Minh bandwagon in the event of Viet Minh victories.

The amount of resistance that can be expected will depend somewhat on the composition of the attacking forces. Here a distinction must be made between the tribal groups and the Vietnamese. The tribal groups, distrusting the Vietnamese for many years and having been helped by the French in the resistance effort, would be most receptive to French invaders. The Vietnamese would prefer other Vietnamese first and the French probably last. Other nationalities

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probably acceptable to both are Thais, Filipinos and Americans. Only the Catholic Vietnamese are likely to prefer French participation.

Presently organized groups will be most effective if there is hope for a replacement of the regime. The bulk of Vietnamese population of North Vietnam, however, looks upon the Viet Minh primarily as a nationalist movement which alone has been successful in evicting the French. Unless the Viet Minh carries out a domestic policy that is so unpopular as to create widespread dissidence, it is likely that the Vietnamese will continue to look upon the regime with favor.

The question of responsibility for initiation of war would probably not significantly affect resistance activities.


Military government administered by Vietnamese in ethnic Vietnamese areas would probably have the most salutary effect upon resistance activities. If a French-administered military government demonstrated a complete change in attitude from its pre-armistice position, it would still, most likely, be distrusted by most Vietnamese and could have an adverse effect on resistance activities.

Since there is little prospect for the emergence of

resistance groups sufficiently large to compete for post-war leadership in North Vietnam, this factor seems likely to have little effect, if any.

SOURCE REFERENCES

Part II

1. Unless otherwise stated, data is based on information supplied by CIA area specialists.
2. CIA, Preliminary draft of Section 56, NIS-43, June 1954, Secret, and information supplied by CIA area specialists.
3. Ibid.
4. 

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Part III

1. Unless otherwise stated, data is based on information supplied by CIA area specialists.